

thr@ll

Anarchist news and views from Aotearoa/NZ #16

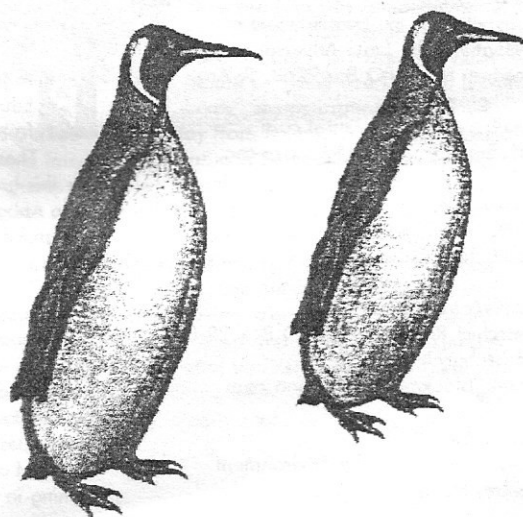
Nov/Dec 2000

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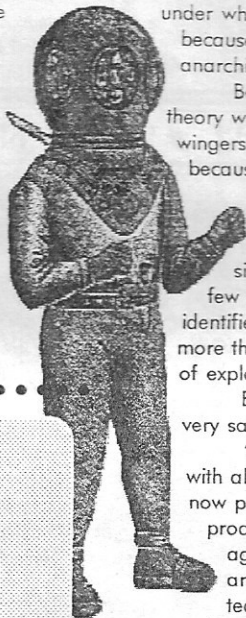
- the labour party: friend of the capitalists
- the global elite fights back
- an encounter with the spanish anarchists
- the perils of pocket dictionary politics



the perils of pocket dictionary politics

It seems Thr@ll can't make anyone happy these days. Fresh on the heels of a blistering attack from the left in the form of *Third Eye* magazine (who've since made up with us), we now find ourselves the target of an assault from the right in the form of an article in the September/October issue of *The Free Radical*, edited by Libertarian Party boss and "free-market" capitalist, Lindsay Perigo.

In a rant in which he tries to argue that anarchism and capitalism are somehow compatible, "anarchist and wit" (barf!) Rex Benson describes Thr@ll as "pages of left-wing rant, with a complete absence of any genuinely anarchist perspective".



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Benson supports his claim that anarchists need "not harbour anti-capitalist feelings" by quoting a line from an article written for *The Encyclopedia Britannica* by that old left-winger, Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin begins the article by describing anarchism as "a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government". According to Benson, because Kropotkin makes no mention of capitalism in this tiny fragment, anarchists are therefore entitled to hold any views they like about it.

Benson again resorts to the "pocket dictionary" school of political theory when he claims libertarian socialism is a contradiction in terms. Left-wingers and libertarian socialists cannot be "genuine anarchists", he says, because – it seems – they will "inevitably call on the coercive powers of the State" to "iron everyone out flat".

The lesson in this, of course, is that political theories should be identified by their actual features and history rather than single sentence definitions of the kind quoted above. Apart from a few individuals in the US, anarchists the world over have always identified themselves as anti-capitalist. This is because anarchism entails more than a simple opposition to government; it means opposing all forms of exploitation, including capitalism.

But perhaps we should leave the last word to Kropotkin, who in the very same article quoted by Benson states the following:

"As to their economical conceptions, the anarchists, in common with all socialists, of whom they constitute the left wing, maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility. They are the main obstacle which prevents the successes of modern technics from being brought into the services of all, so as to produce general well-being. The anarchists consider the wage-system and capitalist production altogether as an obstacle to progress."

Ouch! Now *that* hurts, Mr. Kropotkin...

union busters picketed

Carter Holt Harvey offices and outlets around the country were picketed on December 1 in protest at the forest product giant's decision to use a non-union stevedoring firm to load logs at South Island ports.

In Auckland, about 80 members of the Waterfront Workers Union and their supporters occupied CHH's head office before being evicted by a dozen police armed with long batons.

A similar number of picketers turned out in Dunedin. There the police response was less threatening, consisting of a single copper who warned the picketers not to obstruct pedestrians and then left!

CHH, which recently announced a 214% increase in net earnings for the six months to the end of September, is owned by the US multinational International Paper, which has a history of aggressive union-busting tactics. It makes a number of paper products, including Treasures disposable nappies, Softex tissues and Libra "feminine protection products".

prague s26 activist speaks

Prague is a long way from Wellington, but sitting listening to an Aotearoa Educators (www.aotearoa.wellington.net.nz) activist who had just returned from the S26 protests, it didn't feel that far away.

Though the meeting on November 22 was small, the sense was that groups like this are right now all around the world discussing, analyzing, plotting... The Ernie Abbott room in Trades Hall has, dare I say it, an earnestness to it, but the talk and discussion was both informal and thought-provoking. From anecdotes to analysis, the discussion covered the protest's tactics, organising methods and aims.

The speaker was obviously affected by his experience of meeting other indigenous people from around the planet, who experience the full weight of capitalist globalisation. Adding to the internationalist feeling was a visiting U.S. anarchist – in town helping to organise a globalisation and logging conference – who talked of the tensions between pacifists and militants in Seattle and Washington. Mass, decentralized, anti-mass, non-violent, militant. No doubt the same questions are being raised all over the globe, and while "the movement" is confused on many questions, for the IMF and World Bank some of the answers are coming in loud and clear.

Max

desperate measures

the global elite fights back

If it looks like shit, smells like shit and tastes like shit then it's probably shit, right? Not according to the heads of the World Bank and World Economic Forum, the Australian PM and *The Economist* magazine.

Anti-capitalist protesters outside the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting at Melbourne's Crown Casino were "misguided" "hooligans" according to Australian PM John Howard and needed to be convinced that the rape and plunder of the world by transnational corporations has merely been the teething problems of a poverty elimination program. On the defensive after a string of vigorous mass protests and growing "third world" opposition, World Bank president James Wolfensohn started the Prague annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank on September 26 by acknowledging the thousands of protesters "outside the walls" had a point and were passionate. And so was he, he claimed, passionate about reducing poverty. The new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative of the World Bank, however, is merely old wine in new bottles. Despite the mountain of evidence of the total failure by the World Bank to achieve their stated goals, the self-righteous elites can do no more than blame their opponents of merely not understanding their superior logic. The 12,000 opponents of the IMF/World Bank who succeeded in stopping their annual meeting a day early were not, however, convinced.

ANGRY AND EFFECTIVE

The Economist ("Anti-Capitalist protests: Angry and effective" Sept 23 2000) argues that the "irrational" protesters could cause "an unparalleled catastrophe for the planet's most desperate people if they slow down or even reverse the economic trends of the last 20 years". Unless they mean global elites when they say "the planet's most desperate people" then it's hard to see where their proof is. The very same issue of *The Economist* points out that the "average Chief Executive earns 475 times as much as the average factory worker, up from a ratio of 42 in 1980" and that "the real pay of the least educated has actually fallen over the last 20 years". The *UN Human Development Report 2000* shows "global inequalities in income increased in the 20th century by orders of magnitude out of proportion of anything experienced before". The distance between the incomes of the richest and poorest country has increased from 3:1 in 1920, 35:1 in 1950, 44:1 in 1973 and 72:1 in 1992. According to the report's principal coordinator, Dr Richard Jolly, a similar calculation today would show an even greater gap. So where is their proof of the benefits of capitalist globalisation?

Certainly not in their example of Indonesia, where millions of people now struggle to survive despite years of the World Bank lining the pockets of Soeharto. Maybe like Soeharto, these elites – once considered so wise – will be suddenly mentally unfit to stand trial.

SHUTTING OUT THE THIRD WORLD

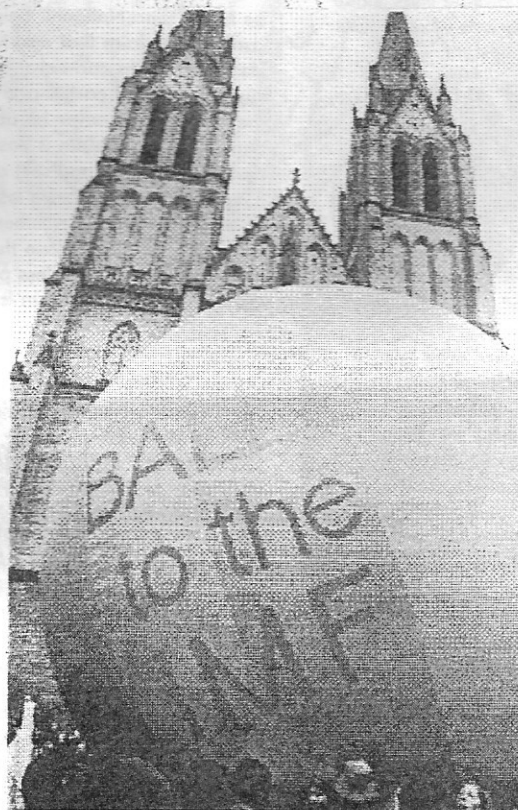
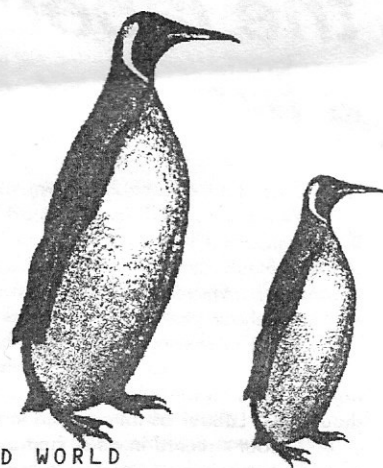
The Economist also makes the mistake of only locating the anti-capitalists in the "first world", noting that "street protests did in fact succeed in shutting down the Seattle trade talks" but entirely ignoring the walkout by third world delegates sick of being ignored and shut out of the powerful "green room" negotiations which truly ended the Seattle talks. While I'm not about to suggest that all protesters have degrees in economics, to claim that "many of the protesters know little about the organizations they are attacking" denies two things. Firstly, many people know little about the organizations they defend. Secondly, the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, the Landless Peasants Union in Brazil and farmers from Karnataka, India all know very well what these organisations are about. Peoples Global Action (one of the main organizing bodies for the new global days of protest against capitalism) in fact grew out of the Pan-Continental Conference Against Neo-Liberalism organized by the Zapatistas.

The Economist then goes on to question the democratic structures of Oxfam and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. Fair enough too. But where's the questioning of the undemocratically elected World Bank, where dollars buy votes? Or the unelected WEF, who claim credit for setting up the WTO?

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

In fact there's a lot they don't question. Like why almost nobody except them believes in the trickle down theory any more, that Mike Moore's "rising tide that will lift all boats" seems irrationally optimistic

in the face of around 24,000 deaths a day from hunger and hunger related diseases. They exist in a fairytale where all can be prosperous even while elites gain ludicrous shares of market, wealth and resources. Where rapacious big businesses aren't creating poverty but accidentally "leaving the poor behind". No surprise then that right in the middle of *The Economist* article is a double page advertisement by Shell claiming that human rights is "the heart of our business". I guess, like the poor, they "accidentally" left behind the information that they are being taken to court again over the murder of Nigerian activist Ken Saro Wiwa and that 10,000 Nigerians took part in the June 18 (J18) 2000 Carnival against Capitalism. These silly protesters, if only someone would explain to them the benefits of plundering corporations and elites appearing to care a lot...



the labour party: a friend of the capitalists

Every time a Labour government is elected, different left-wing groups tell us to support Labour. These same groups tell us to vote Labour every time an election comes around. They tell us that the Labour Party must be supported because it is a working class party, friend of the workers. Labour may have working class members – though it has become increasingly dominated by middle class professionals – and working class support, but that does not make it a working class organisation. Instead of supporting Labour, we should view Labour as an obstacle to working class liberation.

Labour's record in office and out clearly illustrates it is a party for capitalism. It has regularly and routinely acted against the working class. And it continues to do so today. In 1951 Labour did not support the Waterfront strikers. In 1974 Labour deregistered a militant union, jailed a union bureaucrat, and began the police raids on Polynesian "overstayers". And most savage of all, the 1984-1990 Labour government unleashed "Rogernomics" on us like lab rats. Rogernomics brought in the most extreme free-market regime in the "developed" world. This Labour implemented free-market "revolution" has made 80% of us worse off whilst enriching the pockets of capitalists (local and foreign) to a disgusting and foul extent.

THIRD WAY LABOUR: MUCH OF THE SAME

And the current Helen Clark led Labour-Alliance government is not much different. Some middle-class academics claim that Labour represents a "third way" between the old welfare state capitalism of "Old Labour" and the free-market capitalism of Rogernomics. There is little substance behind this claim. Despite a few cosmetic changes, Labour in office has basically continued the very same pro-capitalist, bash the workers, free-market policies of the Rogernomics era. This can be seen in the new Employment Relations Act (ERA) and Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

The ERA brings in the harshest anti-strike legislation in the "developed" world. As Chris Trotter has written, the ERA is a piece of legislation written by trade union bureaucrats because it outlaws wildcat strikes (strikes which go ahead without the blessing of union bureaucrats). Union bureaucrats will ensure that workers do not ask for "unreasonable" (i.e. higher) wages, and workers cannot legally go out on wildcat strikes in resistance to this. So the ERA seems to ensure that the union grassroots membership (or rank and file) will be kept under the control of union bureaucrats. (Chris Trotter, *NZ Political Review*, September, p2). This suits the capitalist elite just fine, as they are worried about workers becoming stropky about many, if not most, not receiving pay increases in real terms since 1991. So the union bureaucracy once more – after a period in the wilderness since about 1991 – become junior partners in the state machine whose job it is to repress working-class dissent.

Recently, Labour has signed the Singapore Free Trade Agreement, an agreement which will lead to further job losses. They have more in store for us, with the threat of further free trade agreements with Hong Kong looming on the horizon. Labour clearly only really cares about the wealth and profits of capitalists. This can be seen with the recent Business Forum, where Labour only invited seventy rich capitalists to discuss state policy and excluded everyone else. At least the 1984-1990 Labour government pretended it was going to consult workers. It even had a series of economic forums where it

invited the public to discuss state policy, although these were actually PR exercises to sell the terror of Rogernomics.

VOTING LABOUR WITH ILLUSIONS

Yet, despite the record of Labour, most leftists tell us to support Labour. They claim Labour is better than National, and that if we put pressure on Labour then they will hand us a few crumbs in return. Yet all they give us is more free-market madness. Is Labour really better than National, or is it just the alternative party of the bourgeoisie (i.e. capitalist class)? It is precisely because Labour is perceived to be less harsh than National that it can actually get away with more than National. People are more likely to oppose a National government, and so the capitalist class can use the Labour Party to bring in policies which suit them and not us, like Rogernomics and the Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

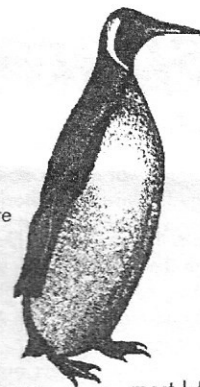
A party like Labour seems to offer change and seems to be better than National. Being out of office so frequently, they can always claim that next time things will be different. However, things can never be different as long as people support political parties and capitalism. Labour (or Alliance, or the Greens) will never be able to fundamentally change capitalism. Capitalism is based upon the making of commodities (things to buy and sell) and the exploitation of labour. People who work receive less than they produce, the surplus going to the bosses, whether private or state. Capitalists relentlessly try to increase their profits by making us work longer and harder for less pay and in worse working conditions. With regularity, capitalism is thrown into crisis by this very competitive drive, with heaps of workers thrown out of work and others having their wages or benefits cut.

This is the capitalist reality we live in. Politicians who try to ignore this are soon brought to account by stock market crashes, galloping inflation, flights of currency and capital, currency crises and more. Then they have to return to capitalist normality. This has been the fate of left-wing governments the world over, and has forced various Labour governments to attack working-class living standards (except in NZ since 1984 our esteemed Labour Party has not even been forced to implement anti-working class policies, but has willingly and consciously imposed them on us!). It is this reality that turns every so-called "left" leader into a "traitor", from David Lange to Helen Clark to Jim Anderton. At least some ex-Labour Party leaders have been honest in showing their true colours since they left the party. Roger Douglas and Richard Prebble are in ACT, an extreme free-market party to the right of National. Mike Moore (Labour PM in 1990) is now head of the World Trade Organisation, a brutal organisation which seeks to impose the free market on the world for the benefit of the international capitalist elite.

THE LEFT WALLOWS IN ITS OWN ILLUSIONS

Labour long ago gave up any pretence at wanting to get rid of capitalism. Equally they have got rid of any notion of nationalising large parts of it. Now they have largely given up the pretence that they will make capitalism operate more fairly, and have been openly pro-capitalist and anti-working class, wanting at best an alliance between local capitalists and the state to exploit us in a more stable environment. As Jim Delahunty has written, "the Labour Party as it now exists cannot be said to be a friend of the people, but exists as one of the parties of capital" (Jim Delahunty, *Night's Black Angels*, p9).

Yet many left wing groups in NZ share the view that we



should vote Labour. For example, the Socialist Workers Organisation (SWO, a small Marxist-Leninist party) say that they know Labour is rotten. Yet every election they try and command us to troop out and dutifully "vote Labour". They qualify this by saying we should do it "without illusions". They do this for a number of reasons. The first is that the SWO still has illusions about Labour. To be open and honest, and inform workers not to be conned by Labour would – they believe – risk alienating a lot of support. As the SWO prefers masses of followers to conscious revolutionaries, they have no problem making the choice of directing the masses from above to "vote Labour".

Another reason is more sinister. The SWO leadership know what Labour is: a capitalist party. However, for all their talk of "socialism from below", they do not believe the working class is capable of making a revolution by itself. They believe it has to be led to what they call "socialism" by an elite of professional revolutionaries. Part of this process, as they see it, is that the working class has to go through a series of "experiences" before they will turn to the SWO for leadership. One of these steps is "going through the experience of a Labour government". They think this will teach workers that Labour (and Alliance) is rotten. This attitude reveals the contempt the SWO and the rest of the left have for working-class people and their creative ability to change society, and their manipulative and authoritarian tactics and aims. It also means that the SWO ends up as little more than a far-left electoral fig leaf for Labour, fostering all the illusions they claim they want to get rid of.

ALLIANCE AND GREENS: FURTHER CAPITALIST ALTERNATIVES

Or some leftists claim we should vote and support the Alliance to try and keep Labour honest and left wing. The trouble is that the Alliance in coalition with Labour has done the exact opposite, supporting without much opposition the pro-capitalist, free-market bash the poor policies of Labour. For example, the Alliance has voted in the ERA. Perhaps this is not surprising, as the Alliance is dominated by capitalist millionaire Jim Anderton, who split from Labour in the late 1980s. So the Alliance basically began as a left-wing split from Labour, but has ended up as Labour's loyal lieutenant in a pro-free market coalition.

Or some view the Greens as a supposedly radical alternative to Labour and the Alliance. To some extent this cannot be proven until the Greens become part of a government. Out of office, the Greens can cultivate a radical image to pick up alienated voters, but the reality is the Greens have little anti-capitalist substance. The Greens basically support a greener capitalism. No doubt if they did become part of the government, they would be forced to introduce anti-working class and pro-capitalist policies. To be frank, most Green party members – most of whom are middle-class liberals – would have no trouble implementing such policies. The experience of the German Greens in government voting for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia whilst claiming to be anti-war illustrates how Green parties will be forced to operate once in government.

LET'S GET COMPLETELY OUT OF CONTROL!

It is only when the working class is completely out of control that people will gain control over their everyday lives. This seems silly at first, but when you think about it, it is only when

the working class is out of control of any leaders (left or right) and acting for itself that it can liberate itself. When people stop begging on their knees for a few crumbs from supposedly benevolent organisations like the Labour Party, and instead consciously act for themselves, a truly democratic society becomes possible. Only through working-class direct action, and not indirect action through corrupt politicians or union bureaucrats, can a real anarchist socialist society be achieved.

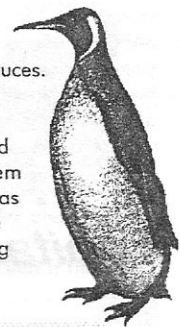
In NZ today, people are pissed off with political parties to an extent never seen before. Hardly anybody trusts politicians. The left may still see Labour as left wing, but working class people know better. Many now see Labour as no different from National. And most realise the Alliance or the

Greens or any obscure Marxist-Leninist sect don't offer much of an alternative. So many people are implicitly adopting the anarchist critique of political parties. As well, many realise the reality of the free market means more power to big business and less control over one's own life. But people are also beginning to question and resist the power of transnational corporations. There is a growing anti-corporate and sometimes anti-capitalist feeling in society, one that bursts forward in protests against things like the World Bank and World Economic Forum.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

There is now a vacuum on the left. Old style Labour Party welfare state capitalism has collapsed from 1984. Authoritarian Marxist-Leninism has been completely discredited after the fall of the Stalinist Eastern bloc over 1989-1991 and the Tienanmen Square massacre in China. So, together with the anti-parliamentary and anti-capitalist feeling in society, there is great potential for a truly libertarian communist – i.e. anarchist – movement to develop.

Overall, the Labour Party is an obstacle to working class liberation. We need to get rid of the Labour Party and its supporters if we are to get anywhere. All the lies, cheating and manipulation of Labour and its supporters would be laughable if the issues at stake weren't so vital. The fact is that capitalism is a disgusting social system. Countless hundreds of millions of people have died in the last 100 years because of capitalism's wars, and from the poverty, starvation and preventable disease capitalism produces. The toll of human life and misery and ecological destruction have had the sole purpose of keeping a tiny minority of the population in power, wealth and privilege. It is towards the maintenance of this system that all of Labour's efforts have gone. Experience has shown that for all their fine talk of wanting to make the system fairer, the system has ended up changing them.



Further reading:

Jim Delahunty, *Night's Black Angels: The NZ Labour Party Since 1984* (1999, self-published). Should be available in your local library.

Labouring in Vain: Why Labour is not a Socialist Party, Subversion pamphlet about the British Labour Party, but much of it is applicable to NZ and was used as a basis for this article. Available online at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195/labour.htm>
Photocopies of these two small pamphlets are available from Thr@ll for a couple of stamps.

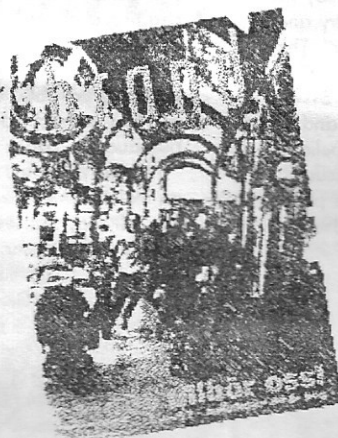
swedish police up in arms over satire

On August 31, the Swedish Ministry of Justice charged the anarchist magazine *Brand* with incitement to insurrection, a breach of the freedom of the press according to Swedish law. The *Brand* issue in question was released on International Women's Day, March 8, 2000, and immediately caught the attention of the Swedish Secret Police (SÄPO).

Brand was established in 1898, and the current editorial collective was formed in 1995. To mark International Women's Day, the collective put together a special issue highlighting the sex roles and stereotypes portrayed in Swedish women's magazines such as *VeckoRevyn* and *Frida*, as well as Swedish men's magazines such as *Slitz* and *Café*. The issue contained satirical columns with sex tips and test-yourself questionnaires. The front cover was a take off of *VeckoRevyn*.

Among the articles was a satire based on *VeckoRevyn's* "How to make your party a success", which was entitled "How to make your riot a success, from A to Z". It is this article – which ironically is a parody of some of the self-righteous posing that is evident within the anarchist movement – that has SÄPO and the Swedish state up in arms. Included are entries on "barricades", "cobble stones" "Zebra patterned sports jackets" and "Xena the Warrior Princess". Advice includes the useful tips that "It is extremely easy to riot in high heels" and that "Zebra sports jackets are no longer fashionable in riot situations". The text was laid out with a baby-blue and pink colour scheme, and was accompanied by a picture of the Spice Girls.

Why did the article cause such a storm? Well, according to the geniuses at SÄPO, a spectacular house squat in Linköping on March 17 – just a week or two after the issue hit the streets – was directly inspired by the article. The only witness in the upcoming trial against *Brand* will be a policeman from



Linköping who is to testify that the squatters used the article as a guide in their action!

Within various philosophical schools, this sort of thing is usually called a "faux pas". *Brand* wrote about barricades and cobblestones, the squatters used barricades and cobblestones, and the squatters did this because they had read *Brand*. Yet Swedish anarchists have been squatting buildings for the last fifteen years. And there has been an abundance of rioting during the same period. The squat in Linköping was not at all unique. Examples are the squat of Folkungagatan in Stockholm in 1990 and the squat of the "Gamla Mejeriet" in Västerås following the results of the EU referendum in 1994. At both of these squats the same methods were used. Squatters used barricades and masks, they threw stones and Molotov cocktails and they fired projectiles with slingshots in order to keep the violent Swedish police at bay. These means of proletarian struggle are well described in a number of handbooks and manuals, and what appeared in *Brand* was nothing new.

The Ministry of Justice aims to confiscate all the copies of the magazine they can come across. However, the issue in question was so popular that it has sold out completely. You can view it on the Internet (minus the offending article) at: <http://www.motkraft.net/brand>

capitalism? non merci...

A bank was burnt in Nice as thousands of protesters from around Europe gathered in the French city on December 7 to shut down a meeting of the European Summit.

As the European leaders arrived, tear gas filled the streets leading to the Acropolis convention centre, and police fought battles with groups of protesters trying to scale steel road barriers.

In Paris, scuffles broke out at railway stations when members of a French unemployed group demanded

the right to free travel to Nice. Police had to forcibly remove the protesters.

Meanwhile, on the French border "Fortress Europe" was again in operation, with the French army denying entry to around 1,000 Italian protesters.

The European Summit in Nice is being attended by the leaders of all the EU governments. It aims to agree on legislation which will undermine the rights of EU workers and create a common European army. It will also hand over various powers to the WTO.

local news roundup

wellington s26 trial set for march

Seven protesters arrested during Wellington's Carnival against Capitalism on September 26 are scheduled to stand trial from March 13 next year. The seven are defending charges ranging from resisting arrest to assaulting a police officer and "disorderly behaviour with intent to incite violence". If you'd like to make a donation to help cover the expenses involved in defending the charges, make a cheque out to "S. Moran" and send it to S26 Defence Fund, c/o CEC, PO Box 9263, Te Aro, Wellington.



sfta demo in wellington

In early November, about 75 people braved the Wellington wind to demonstrate against Labour's new chapter of free market madness, the Singapore Free Trade Agreement. The wind was so strong that one couldn't hear the speakers, which was quite lucky as most of them were from the Alliance or Greens.

Labour has snuck through the SFTA with little public debate. Undoubtedly this is because free trade means more freedom for the rich to exploit us. If enough people knew that the SFTA will only really benefit rich capitalists, whether they are from Singapore or Aotearoa, and result in job losses here, then there would be a movement to oppose it.

The Labour Party is following a new strategy in its capitalist free trade agenda. It's basically following the dictates of the World Trade Organisation in trying to sneak through bilateral free trade agreements with individual countries because universal free trade agreements (such as the MAI) have been blocked. Labour is strongly rumoured to be negotiating further free trade agreements with Hong Kong and Chile. In this way, the international capitalist elite hope to enmesh us in a web of bilateral free trade agreements, and before we know it, we would have free trade written into universal law. Yeeech.

glimpses of an alternative society an encounter with the spanish anarchists

Over the next couple of issues of *Thr@ll* we'll be featuring extracts from Werner Droescher's *Towards an Alternative Society*. In the extracts, Droescher, who lectured in the German Department at the University of Auckland in the 1960s, writes of his experiences in Spain during the Revolution and Civil War of 1936-9 and his encounter with the Spanish anarchists.

Werner Droescher wrote *Towards an Alternative Society* during the last years of his life. He had just retired from the University of Auckland and was living part-time outside Wilderland, a commune on the Coromandel Peninsula, which Droescher thought was similar to communes established in France in the 1930s. A German language version of the book was published in 1976 under the title *Odyssee eines Lehrers* (Odyssey of a teacher). Unfortunately, the English version was never published, although a typed manuscript was deposited in the Auckland University library, along with Droescher's papers.

The book covers Droescher's experiences growing up in Germany in the 1920s through to the rise of fascism in the 1930s and his involvement in the socialist and later anarchist movement in Spain during the Spanish Revolution. It was in Spain that Droescher first met his companion, Greville Texidor (referred to as G. in the manuscript). At the time, they were both living in Tossa, a small fishing village north of Barcelona. Today Tossa is a pleasant enough tourist trap, but back in the 1930s it was a popular hangout for Bohemians from throughout Europe. It was here that Salvador Dali (who was a fascist supporter) built a castle at the end of the beach. The English call them follies.

At the outbreak of the revolution in 1936, Droescher moved to Barcelona and joined a column organised by the POUM (independent socialists). Droescher and Texidor decided to marry anarchist style, as *companero* and *companera*. They both fought together at the Aragon Front, first with the POUM and then as part of the anarchist *centuria* in La Zaida. It was here that they first met Emma Goldman.

As time went on, it became apparent that the revolution was not only besieged by the fascists, but also being sabotaged from within by the communists. Droescher and Texidor decided they might be of more use doing propaganda work back in England. However, Droescher was

prevented from entering England and sent back to Germany. He remained there until the outbreak of World War Two. When Droescher eventually made it back to England, both he and Texidor were imprisoned. After some delicate negotiations, the pair were released and allowed to leave England.

Droescher and Texidor arrived in New Zealand in May 1940. However, once again Droescher's movements were restricted. It was soon after his arrival here that Droescher met Ian Hamilton.

Hamilton, a conscientious objector, wrote *Till Human Voices Wake Us*, which includes an account of his experiences in prison and an outline of his anarchist beliefs. The two men had plans to set up an alternative school in Kerikeri, but the plans were scuttled when Hamilton was sent to prison.

Droescher went on to study

“It was not surprising that the outbreak of the Civil War was quite unexpected as far as I was concerned. The first hint that something serious was afoot was our inability to ring Barcelona. At that time G. was having longwinded and complicated negotiations concerning the farmhouse which she had leased in the Tossa Valley and we had to ring our lawyer in Barcelona frequently.

Then everyone in the village realized that something serious had occurred. The police, the “Guardia Civil” disappeared overnight, where to one didn't know, leaving the warrant officer of the Carabineros as the only representative of the government. This was reassuring as he was a Catalan and well liked in the village. Then we had news from the provincial capital, Gerona; we heard that the military had tried to take over the town. They had not succeeded because the troops who had been sent out to occupy strategic positions had been told by the populace that they were dupes of a fascist putsch, and were not there to prevent a Communist uprising as the soldiers had been told by their officers. Most soldiers left their posts and disappeared unobtrusively in the crowd.



German at the University of Auckland, and later joined the teaching staff there. Droescher and Texidor were living on Auckland's North Shore, where they became friendly with Frank Sargeson and other members of the North Shore “intelligentsia”. Texidor wrote a series of short stories, which were eventually published in 1987 (long after her death) by Victoria University Press.

Droescher remained a committed anarchist until his death in 1978. In 1976 he attended meetings organised by an anarchist group in Auckland, and the group had plans to publish a pamphlet he wrote called *The Little Red and Black Book of Anarchy*. Unfortunately, some of the group's members objected to the pacifist content of the pamphlet, and it was never published. The only original copy that we know of was lost.

Frank



Their officers had to surrender and were arrested.

It was getting obvious that a fierce civil war was raging in Barcelona, however it was not clear whether it was a purely Catalan separatist affair. Catalan uprisings against the central government had occurred several times in past centuries, when Catalans had attempted to gain autonomy from the Spanish governments. After a few days of great anxiety we heard on the radio a speech by the Catalan chief of government who, with a voice trembling with emotion, informed the people that the military rebellion had been crushed in Catalonia, with the aid of the trade

(Continued on page 8)

an encounter with the spanish anarchists (Cont. from page 7)

unions, particularly with that of the CNT (Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo), the anarcho-syndicalists, and the FAI (anarchists).

The first indication that showed us in Tossa that other factors played a role, that the struggle had not been only a military rebellion and counter-rebellion, was the arrival of two trucks from the neighbouring Blanes, where there were several small factories and therefore workers organized in syndicates. It was the first time that I saw the red and black flag of the Anarchists, with the inscriptions of "CNT" and "FAI" – the "Federacion Anarquista Iberica". The men on the trucks were all armed. They drove to the church and began to smash the altar and church decorations. The pieces were loaded on the trucks, dumped on the beach, and burned. The men did not harm the priests, but forced them to be present at the destruction, to prove to them and the whole village that "God was dead", as they expressed it. They urged the priest to leave the village, the priest's house was to be converted into a hospital. Only one priest, the much-loved old father Jose, who was also a painter and collector of folklore, was left in peace. He remained in his house in the village, and used to say with a chuckle, "I'm no longer San Jose, but plain Jose!" The landowner Aromir had fled. If a waiter at

later – and evacuated all British nationals who were willing to leave. It was true that the communications to France by road were very awkward, due to many controls – and there were rumours that the roads were unsafe. The British authorities, who had instigated the evacuation, could not know that no harm threatened their nationals in Tossa, and I believe today that the British, afraid of Red revolution, did their utmost to foster the mood of panic. The social revolution which had taken place in the wake of the suppression of the military uprising had caused consternation and fear in the conservative minds of the European bourgeoisie, even in the left-wing Popular Front government of France, who refused to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic.

The whole situation became clear to me when I eventually got to Barcelona. I had read reports that the Catalan militia had penetrated Aragon, that there was heavy fighting in Andalusia, along the Mediterranean coast, around Madrid. I thought it was wrong to remain in Tossa, to do nothing. I decided to join in the fight against fascism.

The mayor of Tossa gave me safe-conduct and I travelled by ordinary bus and train to Barcelona. On the journey my papers were examined many times, but there were no difficulties as the letter of the mayor proved to be effective. In Barcelona I knew a German, a political refugee, whom I had met in Tossa, who could vouch for my political bona-fide. This comrade had friends among the foreign Trotskyists who had linked up with the Spanish POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista). Through his vouching, I was accepted in the militia of the POUM.

I was politically so naïve that I did not realise the existence of the tension between the official CP and the POUM. I believed we all fought for social revolution and against fascism and that it did not really matter to which party or political group one belonged. The sad story of the POUM and the vile treatment of its members by the CP has been well documented by Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.

The extent of the struggle and fierce street fighting, and the social revolution, could be observed clearly in Barcelona. There were burnt-out churches and public buildings everywhere, others showed signs of machine gun bullets and shellfire. All factories and enterprises had been taken over by the workers; people addressed each other with "thou". No tips were given in the cafes, as it was considered to be against the dignity of man to give and accept tips. The presence of the anarcho-syndicalists was obvious to all. All trains and buses had been painted over with the red and black colours of the CNT.

While I was waiting in the Hotel Falcon – which was at that time situated at the lower end of the Ramblas at the "Plaza del Teatro" – to be sent to the Front, I met some of the British anti-fascists who had come to Barcelona of their own accord, or had been sent by the CP. Through G. I had met some of them earlier: Ralph Bates, Hugh Slater. I also met the young poet John Cornford, who was killed in action soon after – and Tom Wintringham, whom I admired greatly. We experienced the extent of the schism between the official communists and the dissident Trotskyists, in an almost comical manner. Although we knew these people quite well, we had to sit at separate tables when we met in the café, so as not to compromise them.

To be continued...



the Steyer Hotel had not become mentally unbalanced by the events, arrested the owner of a tobacco shop (who was known as a supporter of the right) and shot him wantonly in the woods – Tossa would have been spared any atrocity. This waiter, Isidro by name, was arrested soon after that event and put into an asylum. Only a few days after the end of the fighting in Catalonia, some authorities were functioning again more or less effectively. The "Guardia Civil", now renamed "Guardia Republicana" was again patrolling some of the rural districts. However, the actual control of the authorities and the whole civil administration lay in the hands of the syndicates, who also controlled all the traffic on the main highways and in the settlements.

Bewilderment among the foreigners was great. We heard the noise of many planes, that came from the direction of Italy, flying high towards the south, we heard radio news that talked of atrocities and heavy fighting in many parts of Spain. The name of the instigator of the putsch, General Franco, became known to everyone. One evening a British destroyer appeared in the bay – French ones came a few days

